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OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF THE MEDIAN "EMPIRE" ON THE BASIS OF BABYLONIAN SOURCES

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This paper addresses two different, but related topics: the Neo-Babylonian documentation for Medes and Media and the bearing of Neo-Babylonian sources in general on the issue of (alleged) "imperial" continuity linking Assyria and the Achaemenids through the conduit of Media, or more specifically, the Median empire.¹ The sources used in the following are for the most part archival, not "monumental" or "historical".²

1. References to Media and Medes

Most of the attestations have been conveniently collected and summarised in Dandamayev 1992, 153-156.³

1. I am indebted to P. Briant, R. Rollinger, A. Sima, M. Weszeli and St. Zawadzki for references, remarks and information on unpublished material. The opinions expressed and errors committed are naturally my own.
2. Medes are referred to in royal inscriptions and chronicles foremost in the context of the description of the fall of the Assyrian empire and the situation in and around Harrān (which was relevant for Nabonidus' restoration of the Sîn temple of that city). The former topic has been dealt with thoroughly in the past (see e.g. Zawadzki 1988a; but cf. below fn. 28 on VS 6, 202), the latter is treated by Rollinger in the present volume. There remains the problem of the reference to a peace treaty (or at least peaceful relationship) with URU.ma-da-a-a in one of Nabonidus' Harrān inscriptions (Inscription 13 according to Beaulieu 1989, 32; translation *ibid.*, 173; the text dates to the time after Nabonidus' stay in Arabia). If this is to be taken seriously both chronologically and historically, one may have to construe the passage as an indication that parts of Media remained independent even after Cyrus' victory, which could possibly suggest in its turn that Media was not a monolithic political entity to begin with. See Tuplin 1994, 255, who argues with good reason against the hypothesis that this passage refers to Cyrus, and Briant 1996, 912 with further references. D'Agostino 1994, 62-64 (also 91 n. 32) refers to Pettinato who wants to connect this passage with a Lydian-Babylonian alliance reported by Herodotus (Lydian however being conspicuously absent from the text ...). A final attestation of Media in a fragmentary historical-literary composition of sofar uncertain attribution (Wiseman 1967; contrary to Wiseman the two fragments do join) is of doubtful historical worth given the nature of the text (see for the time being Diakonoff 1981, 118-120).
3. Dandamayev's book should be used together with Schmitt 1994 and Stolper 1994a. In general, only persons explicitly referred to as Medes are considered here. See Zadok 1977, 111f. on the problem of the "Median" characteristics of Iranian personal names (not all of which can in fact be Median). The misgivings voiced by Briant 1997, 45 and fn. 95 regarding the potential of "comparative (Indo-Iranian) linguistics" for the solution of what one could call the "Median problem" seem well founded (see also Briant 1996, 35f., Tuplin 1994, 252 with fn. 20 and R. Schmitt's contribution in the present volume).

Pre-Achaemenid evidence is scarce. One royal letter from the Eanna archive refers directly to the war against Assyria and the Babylonian-Median coalition (TCL 9, 99; Thureau-Dangin 1925). A Median refugee by the name of Kurbanni⁴ is known to have been supported by the palace in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He is mentioned twice, once in a text dated to Nebuchadnezzar's 13th year. As suggested by Weidner, he may have been a representative of a group of Medes, since the rations received by him exceed those for other individuals (for references see Dandamayev 1992, 96). The Mede Adad-aḫu-iddin represents a similar case. According to a Sippar text to be dated to the reign of Nabopolassar or the early years of Nebuchadnezzar (Jursa 1999), he shared with other foreigners and royal officials a certain cultic obligation probably connected with the right to live in certain houses or a certain part of the city.⁵ Given the milieu in which one has to place Adad-aḫu-iddin according to this text, he certainly had contacts to the royal administration. He may either have been another refugee or he may have entered royal service (taking an Akkadian name in the process), probably in the military.⁶ Dandamayev has suggested that a certain Bagayāzu, a royal official (or eunuch, *ša-rēš šarri*) attested in the Eanna archive during the reign of Nabonidus, was the descendent of such a Median refugee (Dandamayev 1992, 54; 154). All one can say with certainty is that this Iranian name is not Old Persian; it may be, but need not be, Median.⁷

Economic contacts between Babylonia and Media may possibly be surmised from the appearance of so-called "Ḫamban-leather" in administrative documents.⁸ The earliest attestations known to me are from the 41st year of Nebuchadnezzar.⁹

Lastly, a remarkable letter to the king must be mentioned (GCC I 2, 395; Ebeling 1949, No. 255). The tablet is a copy retained in the Eanna archive. The king in question must be Nebuchadnezzar; his fourteenth year is mentioned. The sender, who may have been from Larsa, is still unidentified.¹⁰ He speaks of several people from Uruk whose relatives "are in the land of the Medes" and subsequently denounces their whereabouts to the king. As one of the men giving these people shelter is said to

have taken rather extreme measures to remain undetected,¹¹ one can assume that they —and by extension their absentee relations in Media— were sought in connection with a serious offence. This offence, however, needs not have consisted necessarily in the mere fact of their being in Media. The letter does therefore not conclusively prove the existence of political tensions between the Babylonian empire and the Medes,¹² and it is thus not possible to assign a more precise date to the construction of Nebuchadnezzar's cross-country wall north of Sippar, Xenophon's "Median Wall", on the basis of this letter (Gasche 1995, 206).¹³

Another letter dating to the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is structurally very similar to GCC I 2, 395 and helps to put the latter text into perspective. BIN 1, 93 (Ebeling 1930-34, No. 293) is a letter written by a certain Bēl-nādin-apli¹⁴ to "the king of (all the) lands" denouncing certain criminals and murderers. Some of these men are in hiding in cities in Northern Babylonia. The brother of one of them is said to be "among the mountain dwellers",¹⁵ and the escape of the others "to the mountain dwellers" is something the king is asked to prevent. The flight to the mountains in BIN 1, 93 amounts to the same thing as the flight to the Medes in GCC I 2, 395; it is tantamount to a flight to a point beyond the reach of the king and his law, the mountains implying of course lawlessness and (threatening) anarchy, as is normal in Mesopotamian sources.¹⁶

References to Medes and Media from the Achaemenid period are naturally somewhat more numerous, but they are far from being a particularly rich source of information. Early on, one hears of business contacts with the Median heartland, especially Ecbatana. The travels to Persia and Media of Itti-Marduk-balāṭu, the head of the well-known Egibi family business, have been studied by Zadok 1976a, 67-78 and Zawadzki 1994. New evidence suggests that Itti-Marduk-balāṭu and his high-ranking travel-companions were foremost interested in contacts with the new rulers of Babylonia.¹⁷ The single obvious economic objective of these ventures, which began early in the reign of Cyrus, is the import of slaves into Babylonia; otherwise only the transfer of funds between Babylonia and the East is documented. Apart from these Egibi texts several other documents attest to business contacts between Babylonians and Ecbatana. In one case sheep skins are exported to the Median capital,¹⁸ the other

4. Written KUR-ban-nu. Another Mede is known to have lived in Babylonia in the early Chaldean period probably with the support of the state (see below). He too bears a common Akkadian name, so one should prefer also in the present case the reading of the very frequent Akkadian name Kurbanni to the difficult Iranian Madbannu first suggested by Zadok 1976a, 66 and fn. 53; cf. Dandamayev 1992, 96.

5. These people were to provide or at least to care for a sheep eventually to be offered in the Ebabbar, the temple of the Sungod in Sippar; see Da Riva 2001, 337-353. Among Adad-aḫu-iddin's neighbours are soldiers (*mukil appāti, šušān šarri*), a royal merchant, a royal butcher and dependants of a palace scribe, a governor (*šakin māti*), the *mašennu* (see fn. 41, below) and a cavalry officer (*rab urāte*). A man from Kannu (on which see Zadok 1996) is mentioned; the place of origin of a second man (line 3) cannot be identified with certainty. Ḫanūnu in line 28 may well be the chief royal merchant of this name known from an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar listing *i.a.* the king's main officials (Unger 1931, 285 IV 19).

6. It is known that non-Babylonians were well represented in the Chaldean army: Jursa 1998a, 17.

7. The sound-shift involved is considered not typical of Median alone: Brandenstein – Mayrhofer 1964 § 37. Note the doubts as to the Iranian extraction of this man expressed by Zadok 1976a, 67 (see also the general remarks on fn. 3, above).

8. The name could just as well refer to a specific quality rather than a specific place of origin (cf. Oppenheim 1967, 241). On Ḫamban/Ḫabban/Ḫumban see e.g. Reade 1978a, 137f.; lastly Zadok 2001b *sub* 4(a).

9. BM 79658 (to be published by St. Zawadzki) and GCC I 2, 169.

10. Larsa because of line 7, where work in this town is mentioned, and line 9, where a temple-enterer of Šamaš is named. The writer's name has been read Mukīn-Marduk ("DU"-^dAMAR.UTU); this is however an uncommon name (e.g. no example in Kümmel 1979 or Tallqvist 1905) and does not fit the traces in the copy satisfactorily. Pending collation of the original, one is tempted to suggest an emendation of the copy to 'SUJ]M'-^dna'-^dAMAR.UTU, which would possibly make the writer a *šangū* of Larsa (Beaulieu 1991, 75).

11. He killed a slave about to denounce him to the authorities; on this episode see below.

12. As has been assumed by Ebeling 1949, 139, and Zawadzki 1988a, 133f.

13. Zawadzki ("Building Activity in Sippar and Environs in the Time of Nebuchadnezzar II.", forthcoming) presents evidence from the Ebabbar archive which points to a beginning of the construction of the wall very early in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. That its construction was due to a perceived Median threat remains a matter of conjecture.

14. He appears in a number of letters from Uruk, *i.a.* in YOS 3, 63, written by the *qīpu* of the Eanna-temple, Sîn-iddin, who was in office at the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (Sack 1994, 32f.). Bēl-nādin-apli was the son of a certain Zēr-Bābili of the Ile'i-Marduk family: see Gehlken 1996, 60b. Other new attestations of Bēl-nādin-apli are Sack 1994 No. 90 (35th year of Nebuchadnezzar) and 91 (34th year of Nebuchadnezzar).

15. *šaddū'a*, written *šad-da-a-a* (CAD Š/1, 43). In the light of GCC I 2, 395 one is tempted to read *mad-da-a-a*, "Medes". However, this word is never written with a double *d* (the two examples given by Zadok 1985, 215 are wrong: see below fn. 24).

16. Therefore I would not follow the reasoning advanced by Joannès 1995a in his discussion of GCC I 2, 395. He argues on the basis of this text that the formerly friendly Median-Babylonian relationship must have deteriorated because states normally did not grant asylum to refugees from allied countries. This argument is only applicable if Media was not only a homogenous entity, but also a well-organised and bureaucratic state, both of which assumptions are open to doubt *i.a.* because of the parallel provided by BIN 1, 93. On first millennium mountain dwellers and their relationship to the centralised states see e.g. Briant 1982, 9-56.

17. See provisionally Joannès 1999, 185f. and Wunsch 2000a, 104 fn. 24; cf. also Stolper 1990, 171.

18. BM 55464 (publication forthcoming), thirtieth year of Darius, written in Babylon.

texts concern debts to be discharged in Babylonia.¹⁹ Stolper (1990, 170-171) rightly stresses the obvious ease and frequency of business contacts, transfer of funds and movement of people across provincial boundaries apparent from these texts.²⁰

Some Medes appear as Achaemenid royal officials: a text from Uruk from the reign of Cyrus or Cambyses mentions a Median *bēl tēmi* ("officer" or the like) whose name is unfortunately lost (Dandamayev 1992, 155). An unpublished document from Sippar from the seventh year of Darius mentions a Median (royal) "accountant", *rab ni[kkassi]*, bearing the Akkadian name Nabû-mālik,²¹ among officials witnessing the issuing of royal instructions to the Ebabbar administration.²²

Occasionally one finds Medes in Babylonia who are not obviously connected with the royal administration. A "settlement of Medes" (*bīt madāya*) is attested in an archive dating to the reign of Darius I and coming presumably from the Borsippa region (Waerzeggers 1999/2000, 192 fn. 9). Nothing definite can be said about this settlement's precise location or its inhabitants. The parties and the witnesses mentioned bear Akkadian or West Semitic names.

Note the Mede Pattemidu mentioned in an Akkadian account of silver from the Persepolis Treasury Archive.²³ He is designated as a *LÚ.ma-da-a LÚ.DUMU ri-a-a* which Cameron translated as "the Mede, son of the shepherd". Cameron's translation is unlikely to be correct for orthographic reasons; *mār ri-a* (or similar) should probably be understood as "of the Ri'a tribe". This would be an indication of the existence (or rather: continued recognition) of tribal subdivisions among the Medes.

Other references for Medes (male and female) come from Babylon, Borsippa, Uruk and Sippar, and there are also some late fourth-century references from the Murašû archive from Nippur. All these texts offer is unfortunately disconnected anecdotal evidence.²⁴

2. Issues which have an indirect bearing on the problem

a. The extension of the Neo-Babylonian empire

The question who controlled the area of the Assyrian empire after its fall is of obvious importance for an evaluation of the hypothesis claiming that the Median "empire" served as a link between the Assyrian and the Achaemenid empires. Rollinger (this volume) argues convincingly that the Chaldean state was in firm control of Syria, the ideologically motivated statement to the contrary regarding Harrân in one of Nabonidus' inscriptions notwithstanding.²⁵ Kuhrt 1995 has recently presented a strong argu-

ment that the Assyrian heartland itself was likewise under Babylonian rule. Her most important piece of evidence are the Neo-Assyrian tablets written in Dūr-Katlimmu. These are dated to the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign according to the Babylonian system.²⁶ It is also relevant that Babylonian temples could send up their flocks as far north(east) as the area around Takrit already in the Chaldean period (it was necessary to guard them, however, possibly against Median (or other) raiders from the East; the border may not have been far).²⁷ Two new texts confirm Kuhrt's conclusions. Zawadzki (in preparation) will edit a tablet from the Ebabbar archive from the early years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign naming a governor of Guzana: this former Assyrian administrative centre in the Hābūr basin was therefore also the seat of the Neo-Babylonian provincial government of that area. Another text from the same archive, published by MacGinnis (2000), mentions a governor of Assur²⁸ who presents a slave as a gift (lit. "tithe") to the Ebabbar. The text is most likely to be dated to the accession year of Neriglissar (October 559 BC).²⁹ This evidence, considered together with some references to Assyrians or Arrapheans³⁰ dating to as late as the reign of Nabonidus, proves the continuation of Babylonian

19. See Dandamayev 1992, 155 and Stolper 1990, 161-171.

20. On business contacts between Babylonia and Media and Persia, see also (e.g.) Briant 1996, 83 and Stolper 1984.

21. *IdAG-ma-a-lik*, twice. The name was cited without context by Pinches 1910, 63, 3: 29.

22. BM 79541; edition forthcoming.

23. Cameron 1948, 200-203 No. 85; Dandamayev 1992, 113.

24. See the summary by Dandamayev 1992, 155f. (and cf. Zadok 1977, 112f.). Dandamayev does not mention the female name *ḥal-man-ni-tu₄* attested in a contract from Uruk dated to the 163rd year of the Seleucid era (McEwan 1982, 15 fn. 15). According to McEwan the name means "woman from Ḥalman". On this "Median" toponym see Zadok 1985, 148. The woman in question seems to be a native of Uruk. On the difficult name of the Mede *šu-um-mu* (Dandamayev 1992, 123) see now Tavernier 2000 *sub* 5. Among the references to Medes listed in Zadok 1985, 215 two are incorrect. Moore 1939, 15, L.E. must be read [*l*]*ḥaš-da-a-a*, and YOS 17, 300, no. 23 *LÚ.til-ad-da-a-a* "the man from Til-Addu", following Weisberg *ibid.*, 75.

25. Cf. also Rollinger 1999, where doubts concerning the Median domination over the Persians are raised. An earlier discussion of the extension of the Median "empire" can be found in Briant 1984a, 13-43.

26. Note that wine was imported to Babylonia from the Middle Euphrates and the Hābūr area (e.g. GCCI 1, 225, 42nd year of Nebuchadnezzar; for other references see Oppenheim 1967, 244), which would not have been possible if the area had been Median and there had been frictions and conflict between the Medes and Babylonia at least since roughly the middle of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

27. See e.g. Joannès 1995b, 195; Kuhrt 1995a, 247. A new reference from the reign of Nabonidus is YOS 19, no. 222. The argument is based on Eanna tablets, but can be confirmed by corresponding Sippar material. CT 56, 87 from the fifteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar attests a troop of 13 men who either come from or are to be sent to Takrit.

28. *LÚ.NAM šá BAL.TI.[LA.KI]*. Collation has confirmed MacGinnis' reading. In passing I would like to draw attention to another Neo-Babylonian reference to the city of Assur, namely VS 6, 202. This memorandum, probably from Nippur, not from Sippar, has been independently dated to the twelfth year of Nabopolassar by Ungnad 1937, 250f., Zadok 1985, 33 and Joannès 2000, 68 with fns. 12-14. It concerns the provisioning of temple dependants to be sent to Assur as royal soldiers on the 29th of Abu. The tablet has been ignored in the recent discussions of the fall of Assyria. It is interesting for the fact that Assur was known to be the goal of the Babylonian expedition late in the month of Abu even though according to the chronicle (Grayson 1975a, 93: 24-30), Nabopolassar's (future) ally Cyaxares apparently set out in the same month to attack first Nineveh and Tarbišu and only afterwards turned against Assur.

29. The text is BM 63283. Improvements to the edition of MacGinnis after collation: line 2: ... *IdE[N*-/A[G*-...]*; 6: ... *it-t[a*-din]*; 7: *ITL.DU₆** [. The name of the king is mostly lost: [*l*]*ḫ x x*. In principle, this could be any Chaldean king, but the most likely restoration is Neriglissar ([*l*]*ḫ[U.GUR-LUGAL-URU]*) for the following reasons: Amīl-Marduk and Lābāši-Marduk are excluded since there is not enough space before *d* to allow such a reading. In Ebabbar texts, Nabonidus' name is usually written not with *dPA*, but with the ligature *d+AG* which cannot be restored here. Nabopolassar is unlikely because texts from his accession year are very scarce. Nebuchadnezzar seems a good possibility at the first glance, but there are strong reasons against this reading (which also apply to Nabopolassar). Texts from the so-called "Older Ebabbar archive" (now studied by Da Riva 2001), which extends roughly to the end of the first half of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, do occasionally appear in the British Museum's 82-9-18 collection to which our text belongs, but they are by no means frequent. BM 63283 does not have the characteristic thick and oblong form typical for the Older Ebabbar archive; the tablet has rather the thin "pillow-shape" which characterises tablets from the later years of Nebuchadnezzar onwards. While none of the arguments advanced is by itself absolutely conclusive, cumulatively they argue for a dating of the text to the reign of Neriglissar.

30. See e.g. Dandamayev 1997, 42, Beaulieu 1997 and Zadok 1998 for Assyrians and Zadok 1997 (*sub* 1) for an Arraphean.

rule over the Assyrian heartland and its eastern extensions well into the sixth century.³¹ This diminishes considerably the scope left for a Median "empire".³²

b. Continuities?

The Medes and the Median "empire" are often invoked as transmitters of Assyrian traditions to the Achaemenid empire.³³ These influences are said to be apparent in the field of art and architecture, but also in various areas of civil and military administration. Given the at best "nebulous nature of the Median polity"³⁴ there is an obvious need to consider other possible ways of transmission, particularly via Babylonia and possibly the Neo-Elamite state(s).³⁵ I am not qualified to do this for art and architecture, where the evidence for the proposed chain of transmission seems to me to be less problematic anyway,³⁶ so I shall restrict myself to the area of administration and government in the broadest sense of the word, which is precisely where the Median contribution is most doubtful. A thorough compari-

31. On the other hand it is most likely incorrect to consider the governor of KUR.za-mé-e mentioned in a Nebuchadnezzar cylinder (the so-called "court calendar", Unger 1931, 282-294) as the governor of what was the Assyrian province of (trans-Tigridian) Māzama, an area allegedly otherwise referred to as the (province of) Gutium (Parpola, this volume). Zamē is part of the "Land of Akkad" (see line IV, 20) and must be placed in south-eastern Babylonia (Unger 1931, 291 n. 4; Zadok 1985, 333; Fuchs 1994, 470). The assumption of the existence of a Neo-Babylonian province of Gutium (Beaulieu 1989, 227-230), crucial for verifying Xenophon's story about the defector Gobryas (cf. Briant 1996, 52), is based on the Cyrus cylinder where Cyrus' victory over KUR.qu-ti-i gi-mir um-man-man-da is reported. Beaulieu (1989, 228) translates this as "Gutium and all the Ummān-manda" (Oppenheim 1969, 315: "the Gutu country and all the Manda-hordes"; my italics in both cases). As the text stands the second term is in fact an apposition to the first: "the land Gutium, viz. all the Ummān-manda (its inhabitants, the Medes)" (see Weissbach 1911, 3; Berger 1975, 197). Since this translation is grammatically better and makes sense, it is preferable to the one proposed by Beaulieu and Oppenheim. Gutium in first millennium texts is both "an archaic designation for the regions north-east of Babylonia" (Zadok 1985, 144; cf. Joannès 1997, 150) and an archetypal area of origin for enemies of Babylonia (mostly in omens); see Hallo 1957-71, 717-719. The pairing of such a term with the Medes, especially if referred to by the denigrating term *Ummān-manda* ("uomini, forse", according to Liverani 1988), makes perfect sense. The Gutian troops then, who according to the Chronicle (Grayson 1975a, 110) surrounded Esangila shortly after the Persian conquest, were Medes, their leader Ugbaru was not a Babylonian defector, and the whole episode cannot be used to rehabilitate the *Cyropaedia* as an historical source.

32. Cf. the more traditional reconstruction presented by Roaf 1995, 57.

33. Dandamayev 1997 gives a convenient summary of the pertinent arguments; see also Roaf and others in the present volume. A balanced summary of the problems inherent in this approach is given by Briant 1996, 35-38.

34. Kuhrt 1995a, 241, referring to the important 1988 article of Sancisi-Weerdenburg (see also Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1994). See also the similar conclusions reached apparently independently by Kienast 1999. As will have become apparent by now, the Neo-Babylonian sources reviewed here do not contradict Sancisi-Weerdenburg's thesis.

35. Other treatments of the legacy of the Neo-Assyrian empire suffer from their neglect of Babylonian evidence (see e.g. Lambert forthcoming). I will not discuss here the Elamite contribution to Achaemenid institutions and culture, the importance of which was considerable (if not always sufficiently appreciated). See e.g. Briant 1996, 38, Potts 1999, 306f.; 309-353, and Stolper 1999, 1115 fn. 3 with further references.

36. Less problematic in the sense that Assyrian-Achaemenid parallels seem to be clear. The issue of how to recognise "Median" art (especially without verifiable provenance) is quite a different problem (see e.g. Muscarella 1994, 62-64). Note that Neo-Assyrian artistic traditions were known and occasionally put to use for Neo-Babylonian royal monuments (see e.g. Braun-Holzinger – Frahm 1999, 141); this living tradition could conceivably have been passed on.

son of the structure of the Neo-Babylonian state with the Neo-Assyrian and the Achaemenid empires is far beyond the scope of the present paper, of course. I will treat two hitherto unrecognised cases of Assyrian-Babylonian and Babylonian-Achaemenid(-Hellenistic) continuity as examples of how much still remains to do; then I shall briefly evaluate some instances of Assyrian-Median-Achaemenid continuity that have been proposed.³⁷

Any comparison of the Neo-Babylonian and the Neo-Assyrian states must start with stating the obvious, but nevertheless occasionally disregarded fact that the sources at our disposal are fundamentally different. We do not have the Neo-Babylonian state archives, or rather, what remnants of them have been found remain for the most part unpublished,³⁸ and Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions tend to be far less eloquent about political and military matters than their Assyrian counterparts. For this reason our knowledge of Neo-Babylonian governmental and administrative remains unsatisfactory. This dearth of sources—compared to the impressive wealth of information to be culled from the Neo-Assyrian state archives—must be the reason behind Dandamayev's (1997, 42) claim that "[t]he Chaldean kingdom was also a comparatively primitive empire" compared to the Assyrian empire (and the Achaemenid empire, one presumes). This judgement is debatable, to say the least. What information on the royal administration can be gleaned from private and temple archives suggests on the contrary a well-administrated state with well-established bureaucratic procedures.³⁹ A glance at Nebuchadnezzar's unfortunately incomplete "Court Calendar"⁴⁰ may suffice. The list starts with an inner circle of high officials, headed by the *mašennu*⁴¹ and followed, after a break, by lesser palace officials. The second large section is made up by various provincial officials, the "magnates of the land of Akkad". These include dignitaries from smaller Babylonian cities. The enumeration ends with vassal kings from the West. A list of magnates at the court of, say, Esarhaddon, would not have differed structur-

37. The Assyrian ideological aspirations and forms which were known in the Neo-Babylonian empire and occasionally put to use, if the need arose, are a different problem. Nabonidus counted Aššurbanipal among his predecessors and thus claimed imperial continuity (Beaulieu 1989, 139f.; Mayer 1998 however is reading too much into the evidence). After the Persian invasion Babylonian scribes could use Assyrian inscriptions as models for their pro-Persian propaganda texts. These compositions, especially the Verse Account, are most of all *post factum* explanations of Nabonidus' defeat and do not prove any pro-Assyrian sentiments on the part of Cyrus. Also the hypothesis of the Marduk priesthood's supposed agitation against Nabonidus (up to the point of opening the gates to the Persians) (see e.g. Dandamayev 1997, 44; Parpola in this volume) probably cannot stand anymore; Kuhrt 1990.

38. See e.g. Pedersén 1999, 314f. for the archives found in Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

39. There is no reliable published treatment of the dispersed data. Beaulieu 1989, Bongenaar 1997, Kümmel 1979 and MacGinnis 1994 contain much relevant material. It is untrue, as e.g. some royal letters preserved in the temple archives show, that the Chaldean state bureaucracy was "based on the Aramaic language" (Dandamayev 1997, 45). Aramaic was used alongside with Akkadian, without superseding it however.

40. Unger 1931, 282-294; Oppenheim 1969, 307-308. "Court Calendar" is actually a misnomer; the text is a building inscription.

41. This official is best known in Babylonian texts for his involvement with irrigation matters, especially the maintenance of the canal system (Jursa 1995a, 181f.). At least in Chaldean times, he may well have been a "treasurer" as his Assyrian counterpart (e.g. Fales 2001, 54f.), work on the canal system being one of the public building projects falling naturally into the treasurer's sphere of responsibility (as was the case in Assyria). The *rab kāširi* mentioned two lines after the *mašennu* in the Nebuchadnezzar text is the other plausible candidate for the office of "treasurer": the title alternates with Iranian *ganžabaru* ("treasurer") in Achaemenid texts. The extant sources give no clear indication as to the *rab kāširi*'s function in the Chaldean period (see Bongenaar 1997, 136f.).

ally, and the titles, if not demonstrably in all cases the responsibilities, of many officials would have been the same.⁴²

The dependency of Neo-Babylonian governmental structures on Assyrian predecessors (or possibly the mutual interdependency of the two traditions) can be demonstrated by reference to a peculiar feature of protocol: the invocation (for self-defence or for denunciation of others) of the so-called “word of the king”, as a means to be granted direct royal judgement.⁴³ Postgate, who was the first to describe this practice known so far only from the Neo-Assyrian court (although it is attested both in Assyrian and Babylonian texts from this period), wondered if one might consider this an originally Babylonian custom, but opted for an Assyrian origin after all.⁴⁴ Be that as it may, one can show that this legal institution survived into Neo-Babylonian times.

The letter GCCI 2, 395 (Ebeling 1949, No. 255) mentioned above reports to Nebuchadnezzar the whereabouts of relatives of men who are said to be in Media. These relatives had found shelter with some other men. Lines 16-24 read in translation: “... Qunnabu, the sister of [...] and the three sons of Etel-pî are in the house of Šillāya son of [...] atfî. As his slave Libluṭ invoked the ‘word of the king’ [against him], he (Šillāya) killed him.”⁴⁵ When Šillāya seized [...] son of Nabû-udammiq who had written the letter and given [it] to Libluṭ, whereupon he (Libluṭ) had invoked the ‘word of the king’ against Šillāya,⁴⁶ he (Šillāya) kept him bound in his jail and made him swear to the gods under (the light of) Sirius: ‘You shall not tell anyone of this!’.”

The procedure is obviously the same as in Assyria: the son of Nabû-udammiq wanted to denounce Šillāja to the authorities, wrote a letter to that effect and planned to have a slave of the culprit present it by invoking the “word of the king”. Something went wrong, though, and Šillāja got hold of his slave and killed him. He thereupon secured the silence of the actual denouncer—who may have remained anonymous to the authorities—by threats. One is reminded of an Assyrian letter (Parpola 1987, No. 244⁴⁷) which relates the melancholy fate of a man who, having invoked the “word of the king” in a certain matter, was promptly killed by a servant of the man he had denounced. Presumably it was the intention of the institution to prevent exactly such miscarriages of justice.

After this case of an Neo-Assyrian institution in the Chaldean empire, I turn to an hitherto unknown Babylonian institution with an “afterlife” in the Achaemenid and Seleucid empires. Rostovtzeff was the first to recognise the existence of various sale taxes exacted by the Seleucid administration. Doty

managed to correlate the evidence of Rostovtzeff’s bullae with the textual record from Seleucid Uruk.⁴⁸ Subsequently Stolper 1989 showed that at least the taxation of slave sales goes back to Achaemenid times, a discovery recently used by P. Briant as one of several examples to demonstrate the need not to dissociate the study of the Hellenistic states in the East from that of their Achaemenid predecessor.⁴⁹ One can extend both the example and the methodological principle derived from it to include the Neo-Babylonian empire on the basis of evidence recently presented by Baker and Wunsch (2001).⁵⁰ The authors demonstrate that Neo-Babylonian real estate sales were written and sealed—and thus obviously registered—by official scribes or notaries. The purpose of this registration is not mentioned; in the light of the material presented by Doty and Stolper however a plausible explanation is taxation of real estate transfers, possibly rationalised by the fact that the notaries’ involvement (and their official records?) constituted a guaranty for a proper handling of the transaction.⁵¹

The foregoing examples have demonstrated, I hope, the need to beware of underestimating both the Neo-Babylonian empire’s dependency on its Assyrian predecessor and its influence on its Achaemenid successor. The Neo-Babylonian state is indubitably a likely conduit for Assyrian traditions, and compared to the Medes and their polity (polities plural?) it has the definite advantage that relevant hypotheses can be checked against the (admittedly often inadequate) preserved textual record.

We can now turn to the Assyrian institutions and practices allegedly transmitted to the Achaemenids via the Median “empire”. Regarding administration and government, Dandamayev in his 1997 summary article on Assyrian influence on the Achaemenid empire, mentions the following:⁵² the Assyrian “postal service”, to which others would add the “royal road”,⁵³ the practice of mass deportations, the titles “great king, king of kings, king of lands”, the Assyrian system of provincial government and a feudal system of land tenure including the so-called bow fiefs.⁵⁴ Roaf (this volume) adds the important role played by eunuchs at the Assyrian and Achaemenid courts.

Let us consider these points one after the other. Royal roads existed in Babylonia, presumably originally introduced by the Assyrians, but in any case maintained and kept ostensibly in working order until the Persian invasion.⁵⁵ There is no need to assume that the Achaemenids learned about such roads from the Medes. I know however of no positive evidence from Babylonian sources for post-stations established at regular intervals along these (or other) roads. But on the other hand one should note that the main part of the Assyrian empire fell under Babylonian, not Median, rule. If the Persians encountered a “postal service” surviving from Assyrian times anywhere in the Near East at all, they certainly did so on territory belonging to the Neo-Babylonian empire. There are of course uncertainties as to how extensive and how standardised the Neo-Assyrian system of post-stations really was,⁵⁶ and it has therefore been doubted that it could have served as a model at all.⁵⁷ This

42. For Neo-Assyrian officials see e.g. Mattila 2000 and Fales 2001, 46-80. There is the same distinction between the highest (palace) officials and the provincial dignitaries (e.g. Mattila 2000, 165). The inner circle of seven magnates in Assyria includes the *masennu* (named first in Nebuchadnezzar’s list) and the *sartennu*. The latter, the “Chief Judge”, (Mattila 2000, 164), had the same function in the Neo-Babylonian empire. He is not mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar’s list, which is probably due to the bad state of preservation of the cylinder. Note also the presence of a *rab kallāpī*, possibly some sort of infantry officer (Postgate 2000, 104f.), and a “chief scout” (*rab rēdi kibsi*) among Nebuchadnezzar’s highest officials (Unger 1931, 285 IV 8-9). Both officers are well known through Neo-Assyrian texts. These may be originally Assyrian terms (just as the *ša pān ekalli* in Unger 1993, 285 III 38: Brinkman – Dalley 1988, 86). The fact that they do not seem to occur otherwise in post-Assyrian texts can be explained by the nature of the Neo-Babylonian sources which tell us little about the state and its organisation. For a further parallel see fn. 67, below.

43. Postgate 1974b; Parpola 1980, 176, fn. 11; Fales 2001, 179f. and 327.

44. Postgate 1974b, 426 fn. 28 and Fales 2001, 327 refer to possible Middle Assyrian antecedents.

45. Ebeling 1949, 139 misunderstood the sentence, translating it “Den Libluṭ, seinen Diener, hat er, als er den Befehl des Königs [gegen ihn] aussprach, getötet.”

46. The end of line 21 and the beginning of 22 are to be read as follows: ... *a-na muḥ-ḫi* <<“šū”>> (probably erasure), [*šil*]-*la-a iq-bu-ú* ...

47. The reference in Fales 2001, 327 to SAA 5, 244 is to be corrected to SAA 1.

48. Doty 1977, 308-335, with further references.

49. Briant 2000, 31f.; 34.

50. See also Wunsch 2000b, I 34-37.

51. The fact that this assumed taxation is not mentioned in the sale-contracts themselves is not a strong counter-argument. Stolper has pointed out the fact that legal formulae are far more conservative than the transactions they document (Stolper 1989b, 92).

52. Dandamayev 1997, 44-47.

53. See e.g. Graf 1994, 171f.; Briant 1996, 952f.

54. Dandamayev cites with apparent approval (p. 45) R. Mattila’s attempt to link etymologically the relevant Assyrian and Late Babylonian key-terms, *kišru* and *ḫatru*.

55. On Assyrian royal roads see Kessler 1997 and Radner 1997, 277f., on their Babylonian counterparts see Jursa 1995b.

56. Kessler 1997, 136: “complex and not always so well organized.”

57. See Tuplin in this volume.

argument is even more valid if the further uncertainty of the state of the system after decades of warfare and Babylonian rule is added; one should therefore not rule out the possibility of similar, but independent developments and Achaemenid innovations.⁵⁸

Mass deportations happened also in the Neo-Babylonian empire. It is doubtful anyway that the Achaemenids would have had need to turn to specific antecedents to learn about this practice. Here and also regarding the royal titles one should again be careful not to mistake structural similarity for genetic dependence.⁵⁹

Regarding provincial government, nothing definite can be said: the Neo-Babylonian sources do not tell us in detail how provinces, especially those outside Babylonia, were administrated. For the reasons given above it is in any case extremely unlikely and certainly not verifiable that "the successors to the Assyrians felt no need for the Assyrian developed administrative institutions" (Dandamayev 1997, 43).⁶⁰ The regular incursions of Nebuchadnezzar's army into Syria have nothing to do with "the Assyrian system of regular taxes ... not function[ing] any more" and the Babylonian king therefore having to (personally) collect the tribute (*loc. cit.*); naturally the Babylonians, as many of their Assyrian predecessors, had to secure their new territories by extensive and repeated warfare. We do positively know at least of some permanent governors installed in the newly conquered areas (see above on Guzana and Assur), and one may well assume there have been many more, the dearth of pertinent references being due to the lack of state or palace archives. What is known of the internal organisation of the Neo-Babylonian empire suggests a state as complex as and not dissimilar to the Neo-Assyrian empire, which, from the point of view of its structure and its institutions, could just as well have served as a model for the Achaemenids (one need not emphasise that Neo-Babylonian influence is much more likely from a chronological point of view).

The last point raised by Dandamayev has already been refuted: the Achaemenid system of military land tenure ("feudal" or not; this question is immaterial in the present context) is without any doubt derived from Neo-Babylonian antecedents. The question whether the Neo-Babylonian system itself goes back in its turn to Neo-Assyrian forerunners must probably remain open for the time being; it seems possible.⁶¹ In any case the Medes do not have anything to do with the entire issue.

Eunuchs: there are many uncertainties here. A majority of Neo-Assyrian specialists seems to have accepted (*pace* CAD) that the term *ša rēši* generally refers to eunuchs;⁶² for first millennium Babylo-

58. The alleged Akkadian or Aramaic origin of Greek ἀγγαρῆτον etc. (see Graf 1994, 172) is doubtful: neither in Akkadian nor in Aramaic nor in Old Persian is a courier referred to by a word cognate with *egirtu*. Briant 1997, 81 cites Pontillo for a newly proposed Indo-European derivation of the word-family (*non vidi*).

59. "Generic" titles such as "great king" or "king of kings" may well develop independently in different places. In any case the correspondence is not as clearcut as one could wish; Dandamayev himself (1997, 44) cites Seidl, who claims Urartian descent for the Achaemenid titles. Note that the title "king of (all the) lands" is used not only to address the Sargonids (Seux 1967, 315 no. 262), but is also applied to Chaldean kings, e.g. in the letters discussed above, GCCI 2, 395 and BIN 1, 93.

60. This is apparently also the opinion of F. Joannès: "Babylone ... n'allait pas vraiment au-delà d'une reconnaissance par les vassaux locaux et du paiement régulier de leur tribut" (1997, 146).

61. On the Neo-Babylonian forerunners of the Achaemenid system see lastly Jursa 1998b; on the implications see Briant 2001, 140f. and Radner 2000, 244. Regarding the alleged cognates *ḫaṣru* and *kišru*, Dandamayev disregards the evidence advanced by Beaulieu 1988 for the reading *ḫadru*. Note that the Aramaic cognate of *kišru* appears in the expected form (singular-stem */qīṭr/) in the Aramaic incantation from Uruk written in cuneiform: Geller 1997-2000, 135.

62. But there are dissenting voices: note especially Dalley 2001, 198-206, who proposes new interpretations for key passages in the Middle Assyrian laws and harem edicts on which the translation of *ša rēši* as "eunuch" is usually based.

nia, the situation is less clear.⁶³ For the time being there does not seem to be a definite solution for the problem.⁶⁴ It has been justly claimed that one should carefully distinguish Assyrian and Babylonian material, but in the absence of any decisive evidence I would consider it more likely than not that the ubiquitous Babylonian royal officials designated by this term were eunuchs if their Assyrian counterparts ostensibly were eunuchs, too⁶⁵ — in which case the presence of eunuchs at the Achaemenid court would not necessarily be a result of Assyrian influence. One should also note that Briant has presented good arguments to doubt the prominent role of eunuchs in the Achaemenid empire.⁶⁶ One cannot claim Assyrian influence on the basis of this evidence.⁶⁷

* * *

In conclusion then, the Babylonian material reviewed here does not support the thesis of a Median empire which transmitted Assyrian governmental and administrative institutions to the Achaemenids. The direct evidence for Medes in Babylonian archival texts is very thin, and nothing definite can be deduced from it. More importantly, the Neo-Babylonian empire included far into the sixth century not only most of Syria, but also the ancient Assyrian heartland, thereby diminishing the scope left for the Median "empire". Finally, it can be shown that some Assyrian institutions allegedly transmitted by the Medes to the Achaemenids were definitely, and others probably or possibly inherited by the Achaemenids from the Neo-Babylonian empire (if we are not dealing with cases of structural similarity rather than direct dependence).

Naturally I do not claim to have done justice to all aspects of the complex problem of the Achaemenid empire's predecessors' influences on their successor. More specifically I do not claim that no Assyrian cultural traits at all reached the Persians via north-western Iran. But I maintain that to explain these borrowings (e.g. in art and architecture), there is no need to postulate the existence of a well-organised Median empire.

63. See Radner 1997, 155-157; Bongenaar 1997, 99f.; Deller 1999 and Fales 2001, 302, with further secondary literature.

64. There is an answer to Deller's (rhetorically intended) question which Akkadian word, if not *ša rēši*, could designate the eunuch *per se* (Deller 1999, 304): *tīru* (George 1997). This "official" is attested also in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.

65. This conclusion is supported by evidence (as far as it goes) drawn from a Neo-Babylonian seal depicting beardless worshippers and naming a *ša rēši* as seal owner: Watanabe 1999, 320.

66. Briant 1996, 279-288; 1997, 67f.; 2001, 109f. Some Greek historians (and occasionally their later interpreters, one might add) were obviously fond of "clichés 'orientalisants'" (Briant 1996, 280) regarding eunuchs.

67. But we can point out another (cf. fn. 42, above) Assyrian-Babylonian parallel: the "chief *ša rēši*" (or "chief eunuch") is one of the main military commanders both in the Neo-Babylonian and the Neo-Assyrian empire: Fales 2001, 57 and Joannès 2000, 66 (note also the new epigraphic evidence from Teima: Hayajneh 2001; Müller – Al-Said 2001).